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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the evolution of national bibliographies. The first section provides an overview of the development over the last 30 years of national bibliographies in the context of universal bibliographic control. The second section describes the following major functions of national bibliographies: (1) national bibliographies are set out in legal deposit law; (2) the national bibliography as memory; (3) the national bibliography as information on current publishing; (4) the national bibliography as bibliographic database; and (5) the national bibliography as saleable product. The third section considers the evolution and changing context of the different components of national bibliographies--the materials, the bibliography, and library automation infrastructure. The fourth section traces the natural evolution toward a national online bibliography of traditional materials and tangible electronic resources, including production and distribution. The fifth section considers the concept of a national bibliographic survey for online items. (MES)

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Uses and usefulness of national bibliographies : which perspectives?

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Abstract:

After an overview of the development over the last 30 years of national bibliographies in the context of universal bibliographic control, the author considers the evolution of their different components (the materials, the library itself, the automation environment, etc.) and traces the natural evolution toward an online, current national bibliography for traditional materials, even though the very concept of a national bibliographic survey for online items requires complete redefinition.

1. A particular notion of universal bibliographic control

Today, the creation, production, and distribution of official nation bibliographies of current materials are completely integrated into the mission of national libraries. This mission was assigned to them by legal deposit legislation (1), but these laws rarely go into detail about the library technical services means and techniques needed to achieve it. Similarly, on the international level, the library community, and particularly the community of national libraries, has been imbued for almost 30 years with the overarching principles set out by IFLA, that is: universal bibliographic control (2) and universal access to information.

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These principles have provided the impetus for the great surge in the creation of national bibliographies, and one might hazard today that the lack of national bibliographic control is never based on a refusal to accept this principle, but rather, on an impossibility, be it economic or structural -- economic in that a capital investment to create a national bibliography will not suffice; it is also necessary to have additional funds, an operating budget each year for regular production and publication, or structural in that a low volume of publishing, poor distribution of publications, or the indifferent application of legal deposit law can prevent a national library from being able to create and foster its national bibliography.

Whatever the reason, and in the vast majority of countries, as shown in the work of Barbara Bell (3), national bibliographies exist that apply as best they can the various international recommendations of 1979 (4) and 1998 (5).

Therefore, in the case of most large national libraries, from year to year their online national bibliography of current materials is made up of records prepared in accordance with the legal deposit requirements of the country in question.

It is distributed in the form of commercial products: the paper version is still quite in evidence, but the CD ROM version, a more recent arrival on the scene, has allowed for the expansion of bibliographic uses of bibliographies because of its greatly increased indexing and searching potential. Similarly, the bibliography is often available in electronic form (ISO 2709 structure) for exchange and for extraction of records by subscription or by request.

2. The major functions of national bibliographies

In applying the principles of universal bibliographic control, national bibliographies have chosen for themselves and respond to specific requirements. In the midst of a publishing and technological context that is evolving quickly, what continue to be the expected uses of a national bibliography and what is the usefulness today of such a descriptive tool and such a product?

2.1 National bibliographies are set out in legal deposit law

Let us note, however, that some countries clearly separate the coverage of legal deposit from that of their national bibliography, doubtless considering that everything added to their collections, and which may be of research value in ten or twenty years, does not require a cataloging record or distribution of the caliber of a national bibliography, so long as it is possible to identify the item, when the time comes, in the catalog of the national library.

2.2 The national bibliography as memory

It has frequently been emphasized that the publishing identity of a country, and thus part of its cultural identity, is conveyed by its bibliographic system, which is both a show-case and a store-house for its cultural heritage. If a certain number of national bibliographies are not produced, even cooperatively, we soon encounter the pitfall pointed out by the participants in the Brighton Conference in 1987 (6), of two-tiered publications: one part which is considered important *a*

priori, and the other which quickly disappears from view because its cataloging records do not appear in any bibliographic file.

2.3 The national bibliography as information on current publishing

National bibliographies serve to announce new publications. All the same, despite all the progress it has been made in timeliness and completeness, increasingly publishers' and booksellers' practices compete in that sphere, what with the development of an electronic publishing sector (web sites that list new and forthcoming publications, the bibliographic databases of online bookstores, etc.). Official national bibliographies are thus shifting from being the more or less preeminent acquisitions tool to becoming a complementary reference tool for acquisitions: national bibliographies no longer reflect the legal deposit or copyright activity at a particular point in time, but rather reveal a picture of publishing over a specific period. They remain, however, incomparable retrospective research tools by virtue of their richness as comprehensive catalogs. The rapprochement with the commercial sector -- seen as a desirable development in some quarters of the profession in order to establish a single cataloging workflow, but which is often hard going in the traditional (paper) publishing sector -- might it happen more readily in the realm of electronic publishing, and more particularly in online publishing? Projects like BIBLINK at one time, or like the American New Books Project now, inaugurating a kind of CIP of electronic publishing, are vital for the future of library/publisher relations, because the creation of descriptive metadata at the earliest point in creating and producing the document would free catalogers from part of their tasks, thereby permitting them to concentrate entirely on the tasks of consistency of access, that is, on authority work. This is a benefit in terms of the idea of quality which must remain more than ever in the forefront.

2.4 The national bibliography as bibliographic database

The practice of finding and adapting cataloging records is wide-spread. National bibliographies, either alone or integrated into union catalogs, are one of the databases for retrieving cataloging records, either because national libraries distribute their cataloging to strengthen the national library network (in the context of national bibliographic services) or because their cataloging records constitute one of the likely databases (along with private publishers' data files) from which the nation's libraries can search and retrieve records, thus facilitating their collection development and acquisition by subject matter. But the same thing can be said of records in national library catalogs.

Automation and retrospective conversion of card catalogs enhance the role of national bibliographies as memory, but these catalogs are often quite riche in national documentation of all sorts (pamphlets, posters, tracts, publicity brochures, etc.) that is not always captured in current bibliographic surveys. The catalogs of national libraries thus become themselves the national "memory."

2.5 The national bibliography as saleable product

The national bibliography is frequently a product destined more for the foreign than the domestic market. It is the official shop-window for the nation's publishing, particularly for foreign

institutions; numerous subscriptions to the national bibliography, in whatever format, are distributed beyond a country's borders. Statistics are generated based on it. It constitutes, more than the catalog itself, the database in which foreign users search. Identified as such, national bibliography records provide access in a number of international databases.

The overall traditional principles concerning the usefulness of national bibliographies are reemerging, as at the beginning of the '70s. Bibliographies give timely information about national publishing; they serve as a reference for acquisitions; their records are used in local catalogs in libraries across the country; or they provide access to the nation's publishing in foreign catalogs, etc. There are of course some changes in how the records are adapted as technologies evolve, but nothing major. The principal difference from the 1970s is that for most countries today, other means exist to promote their national publishing output, or construct a local library catalog by means of copy cataloging, etc., in great part because of the success of the Internet and of web sites which are wonderful links to information. In any case, if this new tool brings about many changes, questions about the usefulness of national bibliographies only make sense if there are other means of electronic reference available. Otherwise, the first priority remains to create and produce a national bibliography regularly.

This evolution without revolution is certainly normal if one takes into account the fact that the raw materials used remains "traditional": the amount of printed and audiovisual materials to be cataloged is still much greater than the number of tangible electronic documents, not to mention online [intangible electronic] documents which for the moment are of concern in a very few countries. However, on the subject of legal deposit, there are many symptoms of accelerating change; should we then find new models or follow traditional paths?

3. Some thoughts on changing context

3.1 The materials

Materials submitted for legal deposit are diverse: without losing any of their numerical significance, printed items are in competition with tangible electronic and multimedia materials; legal deposit now also applies to film, radio, and television; in addition, today there is also an enormous amount of material available only on the Internet and web sites in particular, constituting a new dimension of the national cultural patrimony.

3.2 The bibliography

Bibliographies are becoming richer and are changing: in addition to the obligatory materials that played a central role in the initial recommendations of the '70s (monographs and serials, including government documents), the bibliographic field to be surveyed has not expanded to include numerous kinds of materials, including tangible electronic documents. Moreover, as a documents themselves, national bibliographies have entered the "virtual" age, and several already have online versions.

However, online documents rarely appear in national bibliographies due to their dispensation for the time being from legal deposit requirements in most laws. This new category of material is

currently the major focus of national libraries as much for political and economic reasons as for cultural ones. Several recent questionnaires on bibliographic control of electronic online documents already survey national libraries about their bibliographic coverage (7). The principle of acquiring selectively having been accepted on the international level (1st English version. 2000), the most important thing remaining is to define the parameters of selection in terms of contents and typology of sites to collect.

The proliferation of types of formats to be cataloged has sometimes brought with it a multiplying of benefitting institutions depending on the country.

This proliferation only serves to underline the paradox already noted of the descriptive norms for certain printed materials. Certain more or less ephemeral printed materials are sometimes exempted from current cataloging in order to respond in part to the constant concern of catalogers and of users about reducing the time between the moment of legal deposit and the appearance of the corresponding bibliographic record in the national bibliography. This gap between what is legally deposited and what is listed in the national bibliography deserves to be analyzed at the international level, because the library's online catalog becomes a sort of retrospective component of universal bibliographic control where one finds the cultural patrimony in more complete form than in the current national bibliography. However, if the choice of an ever-widening gap between what is deposited and what appears in the bibliography becomes more common, the latter will end up covering only what "professional publishers" themselves have selected and considered to be of value, increasingly on the basis of commercial databases and web sites of new publications; national libraries would only "provide access" to what is retained by all the other libraries. It is thus very important to take care that materials outside mainstream publishing, that is, the most marginal and ephemeral materials, be collected and cataloged, since they will be the primary sources for tomorrow's research. It is this type of material that perhaps argues most strongly for collaboration among libraries in collecting and providing legal deposit cataloging (local and regional newspapers, institutional publications, local and regional administrative publications), including legal deposit registration of the web (local and regional sites, etc.).

3.3 Library automation infrastructure

Finally, the automation infrastructure of libraries is evolving; national libraries have developed their catalogs as vast bibliographic databases in which legal deposit records represent only a part. The national bibliography is thus "virtually" present and can be searched by accessing the subset of the catalog for legal deposit records or by producing an automated file to prepare a product. These production modifications, already examined in this workshop, explain in the IFLA questionnaire (8), the topic this way:

"Are the online national bibliographic record available:

– mixed in as part of the files include all records held by our agency
– as a separate file of materials published in our country and held by our agency
– mixed in as part of a union catalog of all records held by several agencies
– on part of a union catalog of material published in our country and held by several agencies"

* * *

This contextual evolution seems to bring along with it two major conclusions on the usefulness and thus the uses of the current national bibliography.

- bibliographic offerings available are much greater and more diverse that they were 30 years ago, and official national bibliographies in the strict sense are really only one of their components along with that of the publishers, booksellers, and large bibliographic utilities (in which they are often integrated). Even though great progress has been made in the timeliness and currency of cataloging, the national bibliography cannot compete in its own country with the commercial sector which produces and distributes cataloging copy more quickly, often based on CIP (cataloging in publication) records.

On the other hand, the national bibliographies are increasingly expanding their role as databases on the national level for extracting records in bulk onto CD ROM, but also on the international level, particularly through large databases like RLG that increasingly include European national bibliographies for example.

- national library catalogs that are in large part computerized have themselves become the favored format of national bibliographies, as much by reason of current cataloging done on line as by reason of the fact, already mentioned above, that the catalogs often contains other national documents not listed in the national bibliography. Machine-readable coding of data will allow for searching the entire "national" database; the same sorting mechanisms can be used to limit the search to the legal deposit records.

These modifications in production seem to have repercussions for the use of national bibliographies. The IFLA survey is not shy about posing the question in radical terms, "Are there any plans to eliminate the national bibliography within the next five years?"

Without necessarily prompting a positive answer as radical as the question, this question does merit consideration. New products coming out in the publishing sector on the one hand, new functionality for large automated catalogs on the other, lead to questions about the methods of distributing a national bibliography.

In some countries, the printed version of the official current national bibliography has already disappeared, but it seems that for some time yet, the cumulative CD ROM issued periodically remains the best tool for extracting bulk data to put together a local catalog and for doing retrospective conversion. Finally, we know that the national bibliography itself is tending to become "virtual" by virtue of its appearance online on the Web. However, it seems obvious that if one can choose whether or not to issue an online current national bibliography for traditional materials, should not all "bibliographies" of virtual documents be on line? Does that mean that bibliographies remains necessary?
Let us consider these two aspects:

4. A national online bibliography of traditional materials and tangible electronic resources

For national bibliographies as for catalogs, mounting them on the Internet in recent years has

been the real change resulting in almost immediate access to bibliographic records and their "universal" distribution.

Mounting current national bibliographies on the Web can thus be examined from the point of view of their production or of their distribution.

4.1 Production

Producing current national bibliographies by mounting them on the Web necessitates a changes in cataloging format (moving from MARC to HTML for example). There would scarcely be any reason in this case only to do the same for legal deposit records: current national bibliographies are a part of the catalog, and all enhancements in functionality of the catalog automatically affect that of the current national bibliography as well.

4.2 Distribution

As for distribution, mounting on the Web has its parallel in the production, that is to say, online cataloging in the catalog, followed by selection and downloading, and then conversion into one of the Web formats.

This is a very satisfactory way of shortening the time lag between the publication of an item and the appearance of its bibliographic record, where official national bibliographies can never match the timeliness of publishers' announcements. The speed with which the records are available [via the Web] strengthens the informational use of [national] bibliographies.

Distribution done in this fashion allows for maintaining a **frequency** consistent with the idea of a "current national bibliography" and obviates the costs of printing and postage inherent in a printed publication.

- Mounting the national bibliography on the Web brings up the problem of its **longevity**. But this major problem (if the bibliography is memory, this memory must be carefully preserved) is, or will be, resolved at the same time as the archiving and long-term preservation of electronic documents – a problem tackled in the European NEDLIB project for example. And, absent a solution to the longevity issue, retrospective and cumulative archiving on CD ROM is always possible.

- Furthermore, the arrival of national bibliographies on the Web, and of catalogs as well, has led to consideration of the "commercialization" of libraries' bibliographic data. As we know, all libraries have opted for **free searching** of their cataloging records on the Web and have decided only to require payment for the value added by the institution, that is to say, for services and products: downloading records and CD ROM production. These principles hold good for national bibliographies as well, which are thus free on the Web and available by paid subscription on CD ROM, for example.

The greatest advantage of this new method of distribution is a guaranteed opening up to the world, which has the real possibility of making the [published] production of each country better

known; the [Web] network by itself serves as a guarantor of efficient universal bibliographic control. The remaining disadvantage – that use of the Web is not wide-spread in every country – is temporary.

4.3

In both cases, it is necessary to arrange a link-up with the **retrospective part** [of national bibliographies] and even in the same way as it is being done for the catalog, **to "enrich" current national bibliographies** with direct links to all or part (table of contents) of the item itself. In the case of current national bibliographies, the links possible from catalogs to an uncopyrighted documents are prohibited by the legal issues of protecting authors' and publishers' rights. If it is tempting to wish for other kinds of access to "traditional documentary objects," for example, a national bibliography of prints, "illustrated" by small reproductions of each print cataloged, seems hard to implement, at least in the old Europe, except by obtaining authorizations one by one.

And so, in terms of their usage, putting national bibliographies on line doesn't obviate the need for a manual or an online users' guide: obviously, it's not the searching strategy that needs to be explained (interface design should suffice for that), but rather the extent of their coverage. Without it, a user, even a professional [librarian], will have as much difficulty in 2001 as during the '70s in knowing the real content and the cataloging context of the material in national bibliographies. All of which returns us to the observation that was made at the ICNBS conference in 1998: "The user practically never finds any explanation of what is included and what isn't, nor of 'who does what in the area of collection development and cataloging for the entirety of materials and formats' in a given country; the usage statements to accompany national bibliographies that were recommened in 1977 were never issued. This recommendation must be reaffirmed and reinforced. In fact, whatever the medium for distributing national bibliographies, including CD ROM, the absence of this information hampers its use" (5). This is obviously true for online bibliographies.

5. Online bibliographies for online documents?

As we all know, the modalities for legal deposit of online services (web sites) is one of the major issues confronting national libraries today.

Only a few countries have already instituted it, and two procedures exist to carry it out: the automatic scanning of the Web, a snapshot of a particular moment in time, and voluntary registration in tangible form of a selection of sites held by the library in a more document-oriented file.

This is not the place to develop technical solutions; suffice it to say that it is necessary to pay attention to their normalization and inter-connectivity, but having determined the acquisitions principle, what is the principle of bibliographic control? The new laws like the old ones are silent on the characteristics of an eventual bibliographic treatment [of these deposits].

The "territoriality" that governs the scope of the majority of bibliographic surveys in current national bibliographies for traditional materials will have to be redefined (how will it

[territoriality] apply to a Web site, "in essence" international).

On the other hand, one of the roles of a bibliography is to furnish the legal deposit record with a real identity card which allows it to be distinguished from the record for another edition of the same item. The fact that a bibliography is on line does not change the equation; the fact that the document described is electronic doesn't either. All the same, considering that the very notion of legal deposit for a document as dynamic and changeable as a web site is paradoxical, and that any legal deposit will freeze or fix the document at the time of the deposit (whether by means of a periodic mechanical sweep or by voluntary deposit of the file by FTP for example). One must accept that one is no longer describing a finished product, but rather the state of the document at a given time. This has the effect of multiplying the number of "continuing resources" These "publications in series" on the Internet. The idea of bibliographic description thus favors access points in terms of authority metadata. To go a step further, one could find disconcerting the idea of gaining access to a document by locating its bibliographic record, which record is tied to the document by a hypertext link, so that the document could be consulted at the same time. Considering the overall concepts of universal bibliographic control and UAP, one could reflect over time on the fact that identification of a document is made by visualizing it and rather than by describing it completely. This brings back into perspective the role of ISBD description, the pillar of bibliographic descriptions (already under threat because of data formatting), and that of access points controlled by authority records. These normalized access points, managed by authority files, are more indispensable than ever, and the creation of authority metadata should, in the recommendations, be tied more tightly than ever to the creation of bibliographic registration within the national bibliography. Author/title authority files could thus be one of the referents for managing digital materials, while Web search engines could be applied to controlled indexing metadata, managed by subject authority files. This would be a means of reinforcing and prioritizing information actually useful to users available in national bibliographies in an electronic environment.

Once can imagine continuing on a very limited scale to "catalog web sites" in a format adapted to allow for recording the URL of the site and producing for this limited selection of sites a description more reminiscent of a Web bookmark than of a bibliographic record, with direct access to the site, confirming the tendency these days to transform bibliographic catalogs into catalogs of web resources. However, faced with the quantity of information gathered in the automatic sweep, no cataloging is possible unless it is done automatically. It will be necessary to go back to the publishers and to BIBLINK to have them create the necessary metadata (DUBLIN CORE) at the very earliest stage and integrate it into their home pages (or into each page, depending on the degree of granularity chosen), and especially to have them make as much use as possible of search engines to be able, for example, (thanks to the work done by librarians on indexing data) to select and post the latest sites in the area deemed "national."

In the case of voluntary legal deposit, it is also possible to imagine making registrations at intervals in order not to compete with web sites under development. Current national bibliographies would become in fact retrospective, at least in terms of how they were used.

- the change will come, therefore, with the timely automatic production of bibliographies of online documents and web sites by extracting metatdata (created by publishers and

authors) and through direct access to the site, once the legal issues of protecting authors' rights have been resolved (national libraries will need to find solutions to these questions).

* * *

Are the principles of universal bibliographic control still relevant when the notion of access to the document and to information is so turned upside down by the changes in the object itself that must be acquired and made accessible? Are these principles still applicable as we enter a century which will no doubt bring a reversal of the relative positions of "other formats" (non-book materials [in the text]) and paper [materials], and the increasing intangibility of information carriers? We cannot talk about the chaos of no universal bibliographic control or national bibliographies, but the evolution of the concept does not render it obsolete, just as the evolution of materials to be cataloged does not take away the importance of national bibliographies.

For several decades more, thanks to national bibliographies on the Web, traditional materials will have a new visibility from every direction which will constitute the new universal bibliographic control of the 21st century; one or several portals managed by international documentary agencies will facilitate interesting combinations, the GABRIEL site for example, for European libraries under the auspices of CENL.

Soon on the other hand, as new legal deposit legislation is enacted that takes into account the registration of online documents and services, national libraries will be confronted with the problem of how to the formulate the records for these deposits, and will have to have investigated among others, questions relating to the use of search engines and the coherence of search results, of metadata and the extraction of metadata, Web addresses, the volatility of URL addresses, etc. To handle the legal deposit of these new documents and Web services, the very concept of a national bibliographic survey must be revisited. The COBRA group at CENL seems to be taking an interest in this issue.

A new edition of the guide to legal deposit legislation (1) has just been published. It is now time to think about revising the 1979 recommendations (4) on bibliographic agencies and national bibliographies, so long as we are sufficiently explicit that a real international consensus can emerge in the context of the Internet.

What a great challenge for IFLA and for national libraries!

NOTES

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